IVELCHESTER GAOL,

SOMERSET.

COPIES OF

REPORTS of the High Sheriff and Magistrates of the County of *Somerset*; on an Inquiry into Charges preferred against the Keeper of the said Gaol by Mr. *Henry Hunt*, a Prisoner confined therein.

Ordered, by The House of Commons, *to be Printed,*
21 *February* 1822.

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REPORT of the High Sheriff and Magistrates, dated 5th June 1821.

TO the Justices of the Peace of the County of *Somerset*, assembled at an Adjournment of the Easter General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, held at *Ilchester*, on Tuesday the 5th day of June 1821.

IN submitting to the consideration of the court, a statement of the leading features of the evidence adduced by Mr. Hunt, in support of the charges preferred by him against Mr. Bridle, it appears desirable, that we should be permitted, at the same time, to make a few introductory observations, relating to circumstances, which, although perhaps sufficiently within the knowledge or recollection of the court, it may not be inexpedient to bring before it in a more condensed and regular form.

In consequence of a letter, addressed by Mr. Hunt, on the third day of April last, to William Hanning, Esquire, High Sheriff of this county, accompanied by a pamphlet, intitled, " A Peep into Ilchester Gaol," the sheriff deemed it his duty, to request the attendance of the magistrates residing in the neighbourhood of Ilchester, as well as others, for the purpose of entering into a strict investigation of the accusations, which were therein made against the gaoler. In pursuance of this request, and with this intention, a body of magistrates assembled at the Gaol on the 19th day of April last, when a difficulty at first presented itself, arising from the circumstance of a motion having, in the intermediate time, been made in the House of Commons for an address to the King, for the appointment of a commission to inquire into the conduct and management of Ilchester Gaol. After a full discussion of this subject, it was determined that, if Mr. Hunt was desirous that the meeting should enter on the inquiry, it should not be withstood on the part of the magistrates; on this express condition, however, that, as far as the nature of the case would admit, the structure and accommodations of the prison, as well as the rules and conduct of the several magistrates should be entirely kept out of the view of this meeting, and be reserved for the consideration of a more competent and less interested tribunal. Under this arrangement, Mr. Hunt laid before the meeting, a copy of the charges which are annexed, in reference to which the meeting proceeded to examine evidence upon oath, and also, in several instances, the statements of convicted felons; the object of the sheriff and magistrates being to enter into a full and fair investigation of the abuses alledged to have been committed, which, they were of opinion, could not so readily have been effected, if they had adhered to the mere technical forms of proceeding. The same observation will also apply to the nature of the evidence admitted on this occasion, for it must be conceded, that a considerable proportion of it is of hear-say nature only; but, as the meeting was not invested with the power and formalities of a regularly constituted court, it considered itself, in some degree, also absolved from the restraints, which those formalities would have imposed on it, and it is to be remembered that the same latitude, which was afforded to the accuser, would unquestionably have been in its fullest extent allowed to the accused, if he had thought it adviseable to have replied to those charges before this meeting. The investigation continued during fourteen days (an intermission having occurred during the Easter session) and terminated on the 17th day of May, when Mr. Hunt stated that he had closed his case, and Mr. Bridle was informed that a week would be allowed to him to prepare his defence. The sheriff and magistrates again assembled on the 24th day of May, when Mr. Bridle, under the advice of counsel, declined going into his defence before the meeting, as he said that it might, by a partial disclosure, prejudice the evidence, which he might adduce on his behalf before the commissioners, whose arrival it was his intention to await. The meeting therefore proceeded forthwith to read over the evidence which had been presented before it in support of the allegations preferred against the gaoler, to compare the facts, which had been elicited in the course of

the examination in chief with those which had arisen, as well from the cross examination, (which was uniformly declined in the case of convicted felons) as from the examination conducted by the magistrates individually, for the purpose of laying their Report before the adjourned quarter session, intended to be held in the ensuing week. In the course of this day, however, the commissioners arrived, and opened their commission within the walls of the Gaol, and it now became a question with the meeting, whether it might not happen, from the superior advantages possessed by the commissioners as to their mode of conducting this inquiry, that different circumstances, which had come under our mutual consideration, might not assume a different complexion, and whether the reports, emanating from inquiries so differently conducted, might not eventually be at variance with each other. Under this impression the meeting has deemed it not only more adviseable for the furtherance of public justice, but also more respectful to persons who were acting under the sanction of the Royal authority, to restrict itself to an arrangement, under the different heads of accusation, of those points of the evidence, which appeared most strongly to corroborate the charges preferred against the gaoler personally. We are ready to admit, at the same time, that there are many others which might be equally applicable to the purpose, and an addition is made of two other articles, which have occurred incidentally in the course of the investigation, but did not appear to be comprised under any distinct heads in the list which was tendered to the meeting, as we were of opinion that this information ought not to be withheld from the court.

We cannot close this statement, without adverting to a circumstance which has come to our knowledge, of the surgeon of the Gaol having sent a blister to be applied to the head of Thomas Gardiner, without ever having seen him or ascertained the necessity of such application. That Mr. Bryer did this upon the mere representation, which he received from the gaoler, of the prisoner's "outrageous conduct;" and that he afterwards, at some interval of time, made and interpolated a minute of this occurrence in his daily journal, which, as well as the other circumstances connected with this transaction, he admitted he had done at the suggestion of the gaoler. We regret the necessity which is imposed on us of directing the attention of the court to this misconduct on the part of a person, who has so long filled the situation of surgeon to the Gaol, but we feel that we should ourselves be guilty of a gross violation of the trust which is reposed in us, if we were accessaries to the suppression of a fact, the truth of which Mr. Bryer himself admitted on his examination. We think it right also to state, that in the course of our frequent recurrence, during the course of this investigation, to the gaoler's Occurrence-book, that it has appeared to us evident that frequent interpolations have been made in it, as well as entries adapted to particular occasions, and inserted subsequently to the days on which the circumstances occurred. In one particular instance (that of the discharge of Anne Dunman) it is completely falsified. The punishments, proved to have been inflicted on prisoners, are by no means entered to their full extent, and occasionally are unnoticed.

It has also come within our observation, in the course of the present inquiry, that Coroner's Inquests have been conducted within the Gaol in a most irregular, and, in our judgment, improper manner. We forbear from entering into particulars on this point, referring, for the grounds on which this opinion is formed, to our written book of Evidence, which, from a careful perusal and comparison with other minutes taken at the time, we have every reason to believe, contains an accurate account of our proceedings.

We have thought it our duty to convey our decided opinion in these three instances, as they have severally occurred to our notice, and are not included under any particular charge advanced by Mr. Hunt. In all other respects it is our wish, as it has been our endeavour, that the magistrates assembled in session should themselves form their own judgment on the respective points of evidence, by giving it (as far as that could be effected with any degree of conciseness) in the express words of the witnesses themselves.

It should also be borne in mind, in extenuation of any accidental omissions or errors, that each witness was examined at length, without reference to any particular point; and that, in the extensive range which was taken, no inconsiderable difficulty has arisen in the selection and arrangement of the evidence.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE.

FIRST CHARGE.

Richard Pike, a turnkey in the gaol, sworn ;—stated, That Mr. Bridle never went round the gaol with "the shop" (persons who supplied the debtors and prisoners with provisions ;) the shop came about seven o'clock, and stayed about an hour and half ; they had often left the gaol before Mr. Bridle rose in the morning ; he had sat up as late as two or three o'clock in the morning to let Mr. Bridle in, and his visitors out ; particularly about five or six weeks ago, it was break of day when Mr. Bridle returned from Chinnock ; he recollected prisoners washing on a Sunday in the laundry, owing to an insufficiency of shirts ; knows that prisoners were often released from solitary confinement by Mr. Bridle, without being brought before a magistrate ; remembered a prisoner of the name of Boone working a good deal in Mr. Bridle's house ; he used to go into Mr. Bridle's stable to clean the horse, just adjoining the front lodge without the gate, and, when he was so employed, he (the witness) was in the habit of calling him, to ascertain if he was there, lest he should run away.

John Pickford, late servant of Mr. Bridle, sworn ;—stated, That he had lived nearly a twelve-month with Mr. Bridle ; that Mr. Bridle was in the habit of lying in bed till 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning ; had known Mr. Bridle return home so late as four or five in the morning ; spoke of late hours generally ; recollects Large and Maggott (prisoners) employed in racking wine for Mr. Bridle ; Maggott was very drunk indeed ; Large was tipsy.

Samuel Hobbs, late servant of Mr. Bridle, sworn ;—stated, That he had lived about three quarters of a year with Mr. Bridle ; had known the gaol doors open at twelve o'clock at night, and all hours afterwards ; so late, that it had not been worth his while to go to bed ; speaks of Mr. Bridle's company having been very drunk on two occasions ; states, that one of the caravans for the conveyance of prisoners, was turned out to make room for a cow of Mr. Bridle's, that was fattening, and that it was frequently during that time exposed to the weather ; that Vennel, a prisoner, used to be with him in the stable at all times of the day ; and he did recollect, he believed, his being with him on Saturday night after dusk, between dark and light, after sun down in the winter.

Thomas Davis, a turnkey in the gaol, sworn ;—stated, That he recollected last summer the men were very badly off for stockings ; some had great holes in them, some without feet ; did not think that any of the working prisoners had a change ; for five or six months past, the prisoners had no change ; they must have remained that time without washing their stockings, as he had none to give them ; had known some of the prisoners wear a shirt for a fortnight and three days, without changing ; recollected their washing on a Sunday, as stated by Pike ; spoke of "the shop" as Pike did ; "the shop" had very often, he believed, left the gaol before Mr. Bridle was visible of a morning ; had seen Mr. Bridle frequently bring Mr. Kinnear into his house, after he had been locked up at night ; he used to bring him through the chapel with a light ; never saw Shepherd *, the debtor, attend chapel ; the chapel was not kept sacred, it was made a common thoroughfare till about four or five months since, when some magistrates noticed it, and prevented it.

Jeremiah Hodges, prisoner convicted of a misdemeanor, sworn ;—stated, That he did not know how to answer the question as to how often Mr. Bridle went round to see the cells were clean ; he had never seen Mr. Bridle round to see if the cells were clean, only when he was with people showing the gaol ; that he did not come into their ward above once a month generally.

John Kinnear, prisoner, convicted of a conspiracy, sworn ;—stated, That Mr. Bridle was sometimes up early, sometimes late ; that, whilst he was staying in the house, Mr. Bridle did not transact the business of the gaol till after breakfast, which was at half past nine o'clock summer and winter ; he had never known Mr. Bridle visit the other bed rooms of the ward in which he slept ; that when Mr. Bridle was absent, and Hobbs was in command, Hobbs came round the gaol every day.

* He acted as Mr. Bridle's Clerk.

George Goodman, a debtor, sworn;—Spoke very specifically and at length of the serious illness of Treble a debtor, from Monday till Thursday morning, when he died; that he was alarmingly ill during the two last days, when he complained to witness that he had not got meat and nourishment according to the doctor's orders; that Mr. Bridle did not come near Treble from Monday till the time of his death; that Mr. Bryer the surgeon never saw him after Monday.

John Robertson, surgeon, residing at Northover, sworn;—Spoke of the neglect of a debtor named Davis, who was under his care and died, and of the want of care and accommodation in his case; also confirmed what was stated in Treble's case; was not called on either of the Inquests, although he attended both persons till the time of their death, and waited at home in the expectation of being summoned.

Henry Child, a debtor, sworn;—stated, That Mr. Bridle was very seldom in the habit of visiting their ward; could not say that he ever saw him go up to inspect the bed rooms; their wards were not washed for months; spoke very fully on the subject of the Coroner's Inquests.

Parmenas Matthews, a convicted felon, not sworn;—Stated, That he was punished for being out of the shop to go to the necessary without leave; could not get there when he wanted, (*Vide* Extract from Magistrates Journal); Mr. Bridle did not visit the workshops above once in two or three weeks; he (the Examinant) was washing in the laundry on Sunday from nine till one o'clock when they dined, and from two till four or five o'clock; they washed during the whole time of chapel; he had worn his shirt three weeks very commonly; he had worn one a month without changing; that for the first twelvemonth he was in gaol, he had but one pair of stockings the whole time; spoke particularly of the filthy state of the prisoners in this respect.

Jane Hobbs, wife of the late taskmaster, sworn;—stated, That she had frequently complained of not being able to get nourishment for the sick; has heard Treganza a turnkey, complain that he could not get what was ordered by the surgeon for the sick; she complained that it was very hard upon her as well as the prisoners, and she complained to Mr. Bryer about it; it was very hard upon her, because the prisoners laid the charge upon her, that she did not give the things to them; that upon one occasion, when her husband was casting up the bills, Dr. Bryer came in, and seeing the amount of Ryall's bill, he said he thought it very heavy, as they had had but very few sick that quarter; Ryall kept a grocer's shop; that just at that time there had been complaint about the bills, and Mr. Bryer said, he did not wonder at it; had known at times that the sick were in great want, and had made very heavy complaints indeed; had great difficulty in getting the things for them; her husband never neglected getting things for the sick, when he could get an order from Mr. Bridle; it happened often that they could not get provisions for the sick, particularly broth; had known prisoners detained beyond the time for which they were committed; that her husband, the taskmaster, had complained to Mr. Bridle of the want of stockings.

Charlotte Scott, a convict, not sworn;—stated, That she had been sent into solitary confinement for singing a song, when her clothes were in a very damp state, in consequence of which, she had ever since been subject to rheumatic complaints; was not released from her confinement, till the day after the magistrates had given an order for it.

Elizabeth Summers, a convict, not sworn;—stated, That she had been ill during the last three years; had had the typhus fever very bad, and in consequence had been ill ever since; was ill about three months ago; had not had wine, nor gruel, nor any nourishment beyond the county allowance; that she complained to the surgeon, who told her that he had ordered it for her.

James Marsh, a prisoner convicted of a misdemeanor, sworn;—stated, That he had been in the habit of carrying on his father's business as a shoemaker, before he was committed to prison; the leather brought into the gaol was so inferior, that a tradesman could not make his money of it; there was generally so much offal leather; he had mentioned it, and said that it was not fit for the place; there was a great waste in working it up; if such leather had been charged to a tradesmen at the market price, it would have made him a bankrupt; had made shoes for George Bridle, of this leather.

SECOND CHARGE.

John Pickford, stated, That at the election dinner, the party were all very merry; did not break up till twelve or one o'clock, and some of the party sat drinking till then; when Mr. Bridle returned home between four and five o'clock, he was fresh.

Samuel Hobbs, stated, That when he had seen Mr. Bridle intoxicated, he was either drunk or worse than that, acting the part of a drunken man; he had seen Mr. Bridle mad drunk, bawling, and making a fool of himself; he never saw him dead drunk; had seen him when he could not speak plain.

Richard Pike, stated, That he had never seen Mr. Bridle drunk.

Jane Hobbs, stated, That she had seen the governor tipsy in the gaol.

THIRD CHARGE.

John Kinnear, spoke decisively of the frequency of his being taken out from his ward, to play at cards with Mr. Bridle and others; they generally played at whist, sometimes a round game; he had seen as much as 5*l.* on the table at a time at loo; he thought once a person was looed 5*l.*; if pam had been turned up, they might have been looed 5*l.* each; he had played till two or three o'clock in the morning; had often left the party towards eleven or twelve o'clock, when they had not broke up; he had seen whist played, and 3*l.* or 4*l.* of a night had been lost, as well when Mr. Bridle was at home, as when he was absent; he had known the game so high, that he would not permit his nephew to continue the play.

The foregoing extracts offer a very brief outline of this person's evidence in this particular, it was very minutely sifted, and his answers were very diffuse.

William Shorland, surgeon, residing at Ilchester, sworn;—stated, That he had played cards with Mr. Kinnear, a prisoner, in Mr. Bridle's house, and Mr. Bridle had always been present.

John Robertson, confirmed his uncle, Mr. Kinnear's testimony, and spoke generally to the same particulars.

FOURTH CHARGE.

Samuel Hobbs, stated, That Mr. Bridle was in the habit of swearing at him very much; Mr. Bridle swore loudly, for Treganza had told him (Hobbs) that he had heard him down at the lodge, and asked witness what was the matter, witness then repeated several of the oaths, and said that Mr. Bridle had damned him before the female prisoner Hewit; had damned him a great many times before company; had cursed him in the gaol several times before Mrs. Badcock, and several others; that Mr. Bridle was habitually in the practice of swearing.

John Kinnear, stated, That upon one occasion, Mr. Bridle had made use of a considerable number of oaths in the presence of himself and Mr. Hunt, in the factory-yard; more than he had ever heard him make use of before.

William Shorland, stated, That he considered Mr. Bridle very much addicted to swearing; he did not swear in a common way; but made use of very blasphemous and horrid oaths indeed in common conversation; he had heard him repeatedly; did not think Mr. Bridle was a man of drunken habits.

Henry Child stated, That he had heard Shepherd and Mr. Bridle, when they had been in the ward together, higgledy-piggledy, damning and swearing amongst each other; if witness was to make use of Shepherd's common expressions, it would disgust; he made use of such out-of-the-way oaths; witness repeated some, and said that Shepherd made use of many others equally disgusting, offensive, and repugnant to the feelings.

Nicholas Collard, a debtor, sworn;—stated, That Mr. Bridle had sworn at him.

Jane Hobbs stated, That she had heard Mr. Bridle very frequently swear in the gaol; recollected his swearing very much on Sunday about Franks's liberation.

Jeremiah Hodges stated, That he recollected Hibbert, who was executed, just before he was turned off, inquiring for Mr. Bridle, and Mr. Bridle said, "damn "the man, I have not got patience with him."

FIFTH CHARGE.

Richard Pike stated, That Mr. Bridle did not attend chapel regularly.

Thomas Davis stated, That Mr. Bridle did not regularly attend chapel; sometimes he stopped away a Sunday or two, even when he had been at home; he could not take upon himself to swear that Mr. Bridle had attended chapel five times between the months of May and December last; he did not recollect any thing about it; he did not know he ever saw Shepherd, the debtor, attend chapel, so as to notice it; he had seen him there; for two or three Sundays last past he had seen him writing in the morning in Mr. Bridle's house.

SIXTH CHARGE.

Pike, Pickford, Davis, Kinnear, Robertson, and *Jane Hobbs,* all distinctly speak to the charge as it is alledged. The evidence is so detailed in this particular, that it is difficult to make any satisfactory abstract of it; it should, however, be observed, that those men, who were stated to have been drunk, were intoxicated before they entered the gaol; but Pickford says that he served *them* too with liquor.

SEVENTH CHARGE.

Samuel Hobbs stated, That orders were given him to go to different shops in Ilchester, which were underwritten "For the Sick;" "that to his own knowledge several of the articles, which he had brought back as ordered for the sick, were used by Mr. Bridle and his family;" he particularized tea, butter, grits, candles, vinegar, sugar, spices, other groceries, wine, oatmeal, and meat. His evidence, with respect to each item will be found at length under a future head; and it is right to mention that in one instance, in which he said that he had taken a memorandum in pencil (produced before the meeting) of goods which he had brought back for the sick, the quantity and quality of the articles was found to correspond with the tradesman's bill of the same date. On referring to the evidence comprised under the first charge, it will be seen that different persons, Mrs. Hobbs the late matron, amongst others, speak of the want of necessaries and nourishment for the sick.

EIGHTH CHARGE.

Jane Hobbs stated, That she was in the gaol nearly five years; she is sister to Mrs. Bridle; about eighteen months ago she and her husband used to have the ordering and serving out of meat to the sick prisoners; at one time she served out tea and other things to thirty-three sick prisoners; that there was 80 *l.* a year in the whole kept back from their salaries for the purpose of paying Mr. Bridle some money her husband was indebted to him; that, after this sum was held back, they had not certainly the means of maintaining themselves and their children in a proper and decent manner in their situations; she had seen her husband many times go without his dinner, and leave it for the children.

NINTH CHARGE.

THE cases of *James Hillier, Thomas Gardener* and *John Wheeler,* have appeared in their several Petitions to the House of Commons. It will be proper therefore to refrain from any attempt at analyzing them. At the same time it should be observed, that, although the main features of their statements were not refuted by the examinations of the officers of the gaol, Hillier's examination in particular did not correspond altogether with the allegations contained in his petition. There are several other accusations, but not to the same extent, to be found in the course of the evidence submitted to the meeting; how far the term "torture" is, or is not, applicable in all or any of these instances, is not intended to be conveyed by this allusion to them. As it is not intended to advance an opinion as to the substantiation of this or any other charge, it will be very desirable that the court should satisfy itself in all cases, where the express words of the witnesses are not given, by a reference to the several minutes taken in evidence.

TENTH AND ELEVENTH CHARGES.

Richard Pike, stated, That men and boys slept together in the same bed; that he knew a man of the name of Stillman under sentence of imprisonment for beastiality; that he believed one boy did sleep with him for a few nights; Stillman told him, that the boy Holbrook, about 14 years of age, had slept with him; that the boy Fairfield slept with Jacob Pow, a convicted felon; that felons before and after trial, and misdemeanors, worked with the boys.

Thomas Davis, stated, That all prisoners, who went to work, were kept in the time-yard and misdemeanor yard, and in those yards prisoners for all offences, without distinction, were placed; that Kew, the prisoner lately executed, was at work with boys and men in those yards up to the time of his trial; that George Stillman was also confined in those wards; that the two little boys convicted of stealing apples, and sentenced to a month's imprisonment, were also confined in the same wards.

James Marsh, stated, That he knew it was the practice of men to sleep with boys in the gaol; that the boy, who slept in their cell, was named William Street, who was about 13 years of age; that the boy worked and lived with them at all times; that he *thought* that boys were so circumstanced in that prison, that they were worse when they went out than when they came in.

Edward Holbrook, a boy 15 years old, convicted of felony, not sworn;—stated, That he had slept with George Stillman, and also with a man named Acres; that he did not sleep with Stillman now; he slept with another man named Cottle, who was in gaol about stealing hay.

[*Vide* Magistrates Journal, 12th September 1815, of which an Extract is annexed.]

John Pickford, stated, That he saw Sarah Longman in a room in Mr. Bridle's house, with four male prisoners.

TWELFTH CHARGE.

Richard Pike, stated, That he remembered Sarah Lawrence, a prisoner; that he did not recollect her being in Mr. Bridle's house; she was brought to-bed before he came to the gaol; that he understood that the child was a bastard born in the gaol; he never heard Sarah Lawrence was taken before the magistrates, to be examined; he recollected when Sarah Hewett was first discovered to be with child; it was when she was a servant in Mr. Bridle's house; she was sent out of Mr. Bridle's house down to her ward, where she was brought to-bed of a girl; she had been in the gaol upwards of nine months before she was delivered of the child.

—— *Pike*, wife of Richard Pike, sworn;—stated, That Sarah Hewett was brought to-bed in the gaol, and sent out of Mr. Bridle's house, in consequence of her being with child.

Samuel Hobbs, stated, That he thought Sarah Hewett was better than seven months gone with child when she was sent from Mr. Bridle's house into the ward; that, since witness had left the gaol, he had been accused of being the father; that he had reason to think who was the father of the child; that he observed that Sarah Hewett was very partial to Mr. Bridle; that he remembered Sarah Lawrence having had a child in the gaol; that he never knew that either Hewett or Lawrence were brought before the magistrates, to be examined as to the father of their children.

Elizabeth Wilkins, (a convicted felon) not sworn;—stated, That before Sarah Hewett was put to-bed, she told her who was the father of her child; she had often told her since who the father of the child was; that Examinant never knew any woman so badly off in her lying-in; it would have killed her if she had been served so.

Sarah Hewett, (a convicted felon) not sworn;—stated, That she did not tell Wilkins who the father of the child was; not before the baby was born; she had since told her who the father of the child was; she did not know whether she had told Wilkins the truth; she would not wish to say that she had told her a lie; she

never did tell anybody else, who was the father of the child; that she did not think Betsy Wilkins knew rightly; that she had only had a connexion with one person whilst she was in the gaol; it was in Mr. Bridle's house she had the connexion; she could not tell whether it was by day or by night; that it was her master, Mr. Bridle, who was the father of the child.

On a comparison of the foregoing extracts, from the examinations of the two last witnesses, it will be seen that there is a contradiction, as to the time when Sarah Hewett told Elizabeth Wilkins who was the father of the child; and, indeed, the statements of these women are, throughout, so much at variance with each other, that, in this essential point, it will be more prudent for the court to refer to the whole of their evidence, as detailed in the minutes. It must be observed, that Sarah Hewett gave her answers under great apparent agitation of mind, and it was with considerable difficulty that she was at last induced to declare who was actually the father of the child.

THIRTEENTH CHARGE.

Richard Pike, stated, That he had reported to the keeper the circumstance of the debtors having complained and sent out for other water.

James Bryer, (surgeon of the gaol) sworn;—stated, That he had heard a great many prisoners had complained of the water having given them the gravel; he recollected Mr. Hunt complained of the water; he had certainly seen many prisoners with eruptions on their skins; he would not swear the water was the cause of it; probably it might; the prisoners had attributed it to the water; recollected saying to Mr. Hunt, that the water was not good in some parts of the gaol, and that the river water was better, and therefore recommended Mr. Hunt to drink river water.

John Kinnear, stated, That he had mentioned to Mr. Bridle the badness of the water; had never mentioned it to him in the shape of a complaint, nor had he made any complaint to the officers of the gaol.

Several other witnesses spoke of the badness of the water, and its noxious qualities. Nicholas Collard, a debtor, particularly spoke of his having applied to obtain other water, and of its having been refused. It appeared also, that applications had *lately* been made to magistrates on the subject. With respect to the charge of connivance at impositions practised on prisoners, it was admitted by the turnkeys, that no weights and scales were carried round with "The Shop," but that there were some in the factory yard.

IMPUTED PECULATION.

Richard Pike, stated, That he never knew Mr. Bridle's visitors send out their clothes to be washed.

John Pickford, stated, That he used to get the grits for Mr. Bridle's gruel from Mrs. Hobbs, the taskmaster's wife; he knew they were county grits. If Mr. Bridle's visitors wanted any gruel, they used to have some; he (the witness) had some, and so had the other servants. Four of the prisoners used sometimes to turn the heap of dung, which was outside of the gaol door adjoining the stable, which sometimes took four or five days, and Davis the turnkey used to look after them; that Mr. Bridle would take one half the dung and ashes, and Mr. Sevior the other half for carrying it away; that three or four prisoners used to load the whole; spoke of straw in a loft over the caravan house, to which he and the prisoner Boone had constant access; and that they used the straw which came from the prisoners' beds for littering the horse and cows; that Mrs. Badcock's linen was washed in the laundry all the time she was staying in Mr. Bridle's house; he never knew Mr. Bridle's visitors send out their clothes to be washed in the town; that he carried clean linen from the gaol to Mr. Robertson's house often.

Samuel Hobbs, stated, That he had seen several things done in the gaol which were improper; that he was a servant in Mr. Bridle's house, whilst things, which were purchased for the county, were used in the house by Mr. Bridle and his family; this was generally the case; as Mr. Bridle's servant, he did, he believed, most days partake of them; there was seldom any fresh tea used for the prisoners;

it

it was first made in the parlour, then used by the servants, and afterwards some fresh water and a little skimmed milk and sugar were added, and sent to the prisoners; that Sarah Hewett, a prisoner, his fellow servant, complained of the bad quality of the tea, and said that her mistress need not be so stingy of it, as it was not at her expense; he understood that she meant by that that it was at the county expense; that grits ordered for the sick were kept in the larder, and were almost constantly used in Mr. Bridle's family; he had known oatmeal ground rough in large quantities brought from Wells, as he understood, which was used part for the sick, part for Mr. Bridle's family; that he brought one day a considerable quantity of spices of different sorts, ordered for the sick; that when Mr. Bridle was going to have a party the day after, a considerable quantity of them was used for making pies; that butter was sent for at that same shop, and used in the kitchen and parlour; the butter was sometimes put in the larder, and sometimes spread on bread, and carried into the parlour directly; that it was eat in the parlour, and he did not think it was used for sick prisoners, as none used to be carried out at that time of day to the sick;* that he was in the habit of going to Stainer's and Thomas's inns for wine in small quantities, he dared to say he might have gone more than ten times altogether; that about that time he heard Treganza complain of want of necessaries and wine for sick prisoners; that whenever he brought wine, it was two bottles at a time; that sometimes he carried the wine into the larder, and sometimes into the parlour;* that he went with orders very often to Mrs. Ryall's shop marked "for the sick;" he had seen quantities of meat brought in for the prisoners; the bills were marked at the head, "county bills;" he had seen one bill at one time to the amount of 3*l.* and on that bill there was 96 lbs. of meat charged in two days; that when any quantity of meat was brought in, part was cut out and divided for the sick prisoners, and the remainder put away in Mr. Bridle's dairy or larder; that Vennell and Higgings assisted him in looking after and cleaning Mr. Bridle's horse and gig; Mr. Bridle told him to have those prisoners out to assist him; he had taken them out himself, and left them there; that it was county straw in the loft, because it was bought on purpose to fill the beds; that Mr. Bridle's visitors horses had sometimes slept in the stable, and they used to have the same straw; he knew there was county straw used for littering the cow up; unless Mr. Bridle was wilfully blind, he could not have avoided seeing the straw used for the horse; he had fetched four gallons of vinegar from Morgan's, by a verbal order; the boy who came to carry back the account of it told him, it was to be set down to the county; it was used for pickling walnuts first; he went for it in October 1818; that several jugs bought for the county were, to his knowledge, not used for the county; that he had observed the jugs used in Mr. Bridle's family; one was a large cup and cost two shillings, and he marked it with three notches when he brought it home; he marked it in case he should be called upon on such an occasion as this; he knew the cup was not used for the county.—[Witness went down with the Clerk of the Peace, and the cup was found amongst Mr. Bridle's china, in his larder; the cup was examined by the meeting, and the three notches were found at the bottom of that cup, under the handle.] The soap that was used for the private family was very often fetched and brought down stairs by himself; that he never saw any other but the county soap used in the family; he never saw any soap kept for private use; he saw no soap, except it was the county soap; he had fetched candles from the shop for the county, and they had been used in the house; he used to carry the candles up stairs himself, and bring them down a pound at a time, and put them into the candle-box for private use; he had never gone for candles for the private use of the family; that the candles, which belonged to the county, were kept in his bed-room, and no other candles were kept there, but the mould candles were kept below stairs; he had never known mould candles used in the kitchen, nor by the servants.

☞ This Witness stated, That he had intimated to a magistrate, his wish of communicating what had come to his knowledge on this subject; and was, in consequence, desired to come to the next gaol sessions for that purpose; that he was in attendance on that day, in the neighbourhood of the gaol, but was never called by his brother nor any of the officers; that since that time he had not, until now, given any information to the foregoing effect, to any person in authority.

Thomas Davis, stated, That he had superintended some of the prisoners whilst turning over the dung, and that three prisoners at a time had been so employed; he could not rightly say how long it took, sometimes three or four days.

Jeremiah Hodges, stated, That he had been employed in making a sofa for Mr. Bridle's house; he and another prisoner made it; the rough work was got out in a shop in the gaol; part was done in the cook-house adjoining the laundry; it was finished in the room where he now was; he had the wood, the sofa was made of, from a shop in the gaol. Mrs. Bridle gave the order for making the sofa; it had been seen by Mr. Bridle, but not whilst it was making; that Mr. Bridle knew, afterwards, that he had made the sofa; Mrs. Bridle told him, that Mr. Bridle liked it very well; Mr. Bridle never said that he had acted wrong in making the sofa, or in using the county materials; he had never checked him for it; Mr. Bridle never told him he was not to attend to orders received from Mrs. Bridle; she never told him to keep her orders a secret from Mr. Bridle; they were employed little better than three weeks about the sofa; the wood, and their workmanship, was worth about 6*l.* or 7*l.*; he had been employed in making tables for Mr. Bridle; he had made a dressing-table; had made one for Mr. Kinnear; had helped to paint Mr. Bridle's gig; the county pots and brushes were used about it; his wages were paid by Hobbs the taskmaster, as usual, whilst he was painting the gig.

John Robertson, stated, That when he first came to Ilchester, Mrs. Bridle made an offer to get his linen washed for him, which he accepted, being altogether a stranger in the place; his things might have been washed a month in the gaol; he understood they were washed at Mrs. Bridle's expense; had he known it had been at that of the county he should not have permitted it; at the end of a month Mr. Bridle and Mr. Kinnear told him it was so; he asked subsequently what he should pay for it; Mr. Bridle had settled an account with him since for his professional attendance, without deducting any thing for his washing.

Jane Hobbs, stated, That Mr. Bridle's visitors always had their washing done in the laundry; she remembered Dr. Robertson's things being washed in the laundry two or three times; there were a great many visitors; all who stayed there had their washing done in the laundry; the linen of Mr. Bridle's visitors would be sent in an open basket, without any concealment from him; recollected a prisoner, a cooper by trade, who had escaped by hiding himself behind the pillar of the workshop; he had been taken out to the carpenter's shop to do some private work for Mr. Bridle; to repair his casks; Mr. Bridle ordered him out to work; she understood the casks were repaired from county wood; Mr. Bridle made her husband pay five guineas for this man's escape; his name was Charles Hilliar; she understood he never did any work for the county.

IMPUTED DISOBEDIENCE OF ORDERS.

Richard Pike, stated, That Mrs. Badcock sometimes visited at Mr. Bridle's house a week at a time or more.

—— *Pike*, stated, That she remembered Miss Murliss staying in the house for about a month, or it might have been more.

John Pickford, stated, That Mr. Bridle permitted Mrs. Howard to visit Mr. Hunt in his ward, at the time that the magistrates order to prevent all females seeing Mr. Hunt in his ward was in force.

Samuel Hobbs, stated, That during the time he was living with Mr. Bridle, he was in the habit of having a number of visitors; that Mrs. Badcock used to sleep in the house, and Miss Murliss had been staying in the house a good deal; he never heard any linen, except what belonged to the debtors, was sent out of the house to be washed.

John Kinnear, stated, That he had seen Mr. Bridle bring down Mrs. Howard to Mr. Hunt's ward, since Mr. Hunt's female friends had been excluded by order of the magistrates.

Jane Hobbs, stated, That Mrs. Lamb, then Mrs. Badcock, used to stay in Mr. Bridle's house for four or five months together, and all that time her clothes were washed

washed in the laundry; that a Miss Murliss had been staying in Mr. Bridle's house five or six months at a time; Miss Murliss used also to have her clothes washed in the laundry, whilst she was in Mr. Bridle's house; that Mrs. Badcock and Miss Murliss were not the only visitors in Mr. Bridle's house; there were a great many visitors; all, who stayed there, had their linen washed in the laundry.

[*Vide.* Extract from the Rules in the Magistrates Journal.]

Given under our hands this 5th day of June 1821.

WM. HANNING, Sheriff.
R. T. WHALLEY.
J. NEWMAN.
JOHN QUANTOCK.
JOHN PHELIPS.
JOHN GOODFORD.
A. MOODY.
W. H. COLSTON.

CHARGES preferred against Mr. *William Bridle*, the Keeper of the County Prison at Ilchester, by Mr. *Henry Hunt*, a Prisoner confined therein.

1st - - - Gross neglect of duty.

2d - - - Drunkenness within and without the gaol.

3d - - - Gambling in the gaol with the prisoners.

4th - - - Swearing blasphemous and shocking oaths in the gaol.

5th - - - Neglecting to attend divine service.

6th - - - Opening the gaol doors during the Elections, and admitting the populace with flags, colours and bands of music, dancing himself and others with the women of the town, giving them liquor, and making them drunk, and all this in the presence and sight of some of the felons and other prisoners, and within the hearing of the whole.

7th - - - Cruelty and injustice to the prisoners, male and female, and amongst other things, withholding from them, during sickness and fevers, *meat*, *wine* and *other necessaries* allowed by and charged to the county, and appropriating them to the use of himself, his family and visitors.

8th - - - Permitting at other times these necessaries charged to the county, and intended for the sick prisoners, to pass through the hands of his brother and sister-in-law, the taskmaster and mistress, who had a large family of children, that he knew were deprived of the common necessaries of life, in consequence of his having stopped back, and withheld half their salary, which the county had allowed them, and applied it, without their consent, to pay off a real or pretended claim of his own.

9th - - - For inflicting torture upon the prisoners, male and female, and INFANTS.

10th - - - For compelling boys and men for misdemeanors to associate with, to work, and even sleep with, felons and convicts, house-breakers, forgers, coiners, and even making boys sleep with a man convicted of beastiality.

11th - - - For compelling decent and well-behaved, though unfortunate females, convicted of misdemeanors, to associate and sleep with felons, convicts, criminals of all sorts convicted of uttering forged notes, base coin, street-walkers, diseased and infectious, to the great injury of their morals, comfort and health.

12th - - - For suffering male and female prisoners to mingle together under his own roof, and their bastards to be supported at the county expense, without bringing them before the magistrates to be sworn to the fathers, and being strongly suspected not only of connivance, but of participating in such irregularities.

Lastly, - - At conniving at the prisoners being imposed upon; of knowing that they had nothing but bad water to drink, and refusing their having other water, although he knew it was unwholesome and pernicious; and, in fact, of having been guilty of all those things charged in a publication called "The Peep into Ilchester Bastile," with the exception of one or two errors in the press.

H. Hunt.

Extract from the Magistrates Journal.

1815. 12th September.

Went round the gaol, and found all things clean and regular. Ordered work for William Dovey. Ordered also, that *in consequence of a circumstance noticed in the Occurrence-book, for the future the boys be not allowed, under any consideration whatsoever, to sleep with the men.*

JOHN GOODFORD.
R. T. WHALLEY.

5th Sept. 1815.

Rich. Franks and John Pratt, who are employed as shoe-makers, having complained that they are occasionally much inconvenienced by not having an opportunity of quitting their workshops between the hours of breakfast and dinner, and the hour of dinner and supper,—Ordered, That the taskmaster do in future visit the shops at least once in the day during these hours, for the purpose of unlocking the doors for them.

(Signed) JOHNGOODFORD.

RULES extracted from Magistrates Journal, which were made on Mr. Bridle's appointment of Gaoler.

THE Governor shall not be at liberty to take any prisoner or other person (except his confidential clerk or servant) into his house, to lodge or board without the consent in writing of the sheriff or under-sheriff, if such prisoner be a debtor, or if committed by a magistrate, without the consent in writing of the visiting magistrates for the time being.

The governor shall regularly see that every part of the gaol is kept clean; shall inspect every part of the gaol daily, when he shall be there, and take due care that the cells and beds are kept clean and aired; and that a journal shall be kept, in which the governor shall enter all the occurrences of the gaol.

SECOND REPORT of the High Sheriff and Magistrates, dated 27th July 1821.

TO the Justices of the Peace of the county of *Somerset*, assembled at an adjournment of the Midsummer General Quarter Session of the Peace, held at *Ilchester*, on Friday the 27th day of July 1821.

IN conformity with the line of conduct adopted on a former occasion, we, the High Sheriff and Committee of Magistrates, appointed to co-operate with the sheriff in hearing Mr. Bridle's defence, in answer to the several charges preferred against him by Mr. Hunt, deem it due to ourselves, as well as to the court of quarter session, to offer a brief account of our proceedings, which it is hoped, will at the same time afford a sufficient reason for our not having given an earlier decision on the several matters submitted to our consideration.

It will perhaps be in the recollection of the court, that at the adjourned sessions, held at Ilchester on the 5th day of June last, we presented to the chairman and magistrates then assembled, a written statement of our proceedings, accompanied by a summary of the evidence admitted by us in support of Mr. Hunt's charges, which the court was pleased to receive, and ordered to be filed amongst the records of the county. At the same time, a letter was addressed by Mr. Bridle, to the sheriff and magistrates, assigning more at length, his reasons for having declined, *for the present*, to enter into any defence before us, in consequence of which communication, we were named as a committee (with any other magistrates that might chuse to attend) to assist the sheriff in hearing Mr. Bridle's defence, and reporting thereon at the ensuing Midsummer session; so that an interval, however, elapsed, between the termination of the inquiry on the part of the commissioners appointed by the Crown, and the commencement of that session, that it was found impossible to take any immediate steps in the business. An order was therefore made, for re-appointing the committee, and the sheriff fixed that it should meet at the gaol, on Friday the 20th instant. The sheriff and committee accordingly met, and Mr. Bridle was informed that we were ready and desirous now, or at the interval of a week, if necessary, to hear whatever he might wish to offer, in answer to the evidence which Mr. Hunt had adduced before us, in support of his allegations. Permission was then requested for Mr. White, Mr. Bridle's solicitor, to read a written defence, which was immediately acceded to, and at its close, a copy of the evidence given in defence before the commissioners, was respectfully tendered to the committee. For reasons, which it is unnecessary to recapitulate, we declined to receive any other than oral or documentary testimony, in answer to that which had been verbally given on the part of the accuser, and which had been subjected to the test of our own personal examination. Mr. Bridle stated, that he had incurred a heavy expense in the course of the investigation before the commissioners; that he could only produce the same persons whose testimony was embodied in the evidence now offered; and that it would be utterly impracticable for him to adopt any other measure than that to which he had now resorted. Mr. Bridle then entered into some explanations, which are contained in the minutes of the clerk of the peace hereunto annexed, and the committee adjourned till the following day, for the purpose of coming to a decision on the several charges which Mr. Hunt had laid before them. This minute detail will, we presume, afford a sufficient proof that we have not hastily arrived at the conclusion of our investigation; nor on the contrary, that any delay is attributable to us, on a subject so deeply affecting the interests of the county. It would undoubtedly have been desirable as we have before in effect stated, that we should not have incurred the possibility of eventually adopting a different opinion, from that which may hereafter be formed by His Majesty's commissioners, on charges of nearly a similar import, which under different circumstances, have been respectively presented before both tribunals; but, on a careful consideration of the

subject, we have thought it totally inconsistent with the good order and regularity of the gaol, and with that degree of justice which is due both to the accuser as well as the accused, to withhold our sentiments for any uncertain period, respecting the conduct of an officer, the value of whose services must so materially depend on the degree of confidence reposed in him by the body of magistrates.

On a reference to the summary of evidence, to which we have before alluded, it will be perceived that our judgment has not altogether been formed on "those "points of evidence" (to quote our own words) "which appeared most strongly "to corroborate the charges preferred against Mr. Bridle personally." We have thought it our duty to exercise that judgment on the credibility of the several witnesses presented to us, we have carefully deliberated on their respective testimony, and have not suffered any consideration to operate for or against Mr. Bridle, but what has actually arisen from our own personal investigation of facts deposed to in our presence. Our estimate of the proof of the several charges has been mainly gathered from what has been admitted by the subordinate officers of the prison in the course of their examination before us; and, after having fairly and impartially weighed the evidence adduced by Mr. Hunt with what has arisen from the cross-examination conducted by Mr. White and ourselves, we close our Report with the conscientious feeling of having endeavoured (at least) to do our duty towards all parties interested in the result of the investigation.

1st Charge, Neglect of duty proved in several instances.

2d - - - - Not proved.

3d - - - - Proved to have played cards with a prisoner.

4th - - - - Proved to have used oaths occasionally in the gaol, but not of a blasphemous or shocking nature.

5th - - - - Proved that he did not regularly attend divine service.

6th - - - - Proved to have opened the gaol doors during an election, to have admitted the populace with flags, colours and bands of music, to have permitted dancing, and to have danced himself with a female inhabitant of the town of Ilchester on that occasion, to have distributed liquor, but not to have made any person drunk.

7th - - - - Not proved.

8th - - - - Proved that necessaries charged to the County, and intended for the sick prisoners, did (according to the acknowledged regulations of the gaol), pass through the hands of the taskmaster and matron; and that part of their salaries was withheld, but it is not in proof that it was so withheld without their consent.

9th - - - - Proved to have applied a blister to the head of a prisoner named Gardener, as a punishment, and for a considerable length of time to have unnecessarily handcuffed, day and night, with his hands behind him, a boy named Wheeler.

10th - - - Proved to have permitted boys and men to associate together, which originated from the crowded state of the gaol. Also proved to have allowed a boy to sleep with a man convicted of beastiality, contrary to an express written order that boys should not, under any consideration whatever, sleep with men.

11th - - - Proved in some instances; but the crowded state of the gaol and want of separate accommodation rendered it unavoidable.

12th - - - Proved in one instance to have suffered four male prisoners and one female prisoner to be employed together under his own roof; the former in county work and the latter as a domestic servant. The mothers of the supposed bastard children alluded to in this charge, could not be examined on oath as to the fathers of such children, in as much as the mothers at that time were convicted felons.

Last

Last Charge - Not proved as to the respective matters particularized in this charge; and with respect to "all those things charged in a "publication called the Peep into Ilchester Bastile," we decline offering an opinion on so diffuse an accusation.

Given under our hands the 27th day of July 1821.

WM HANNING, Sheriff.
JOHN GOODFORD.
JOHN PHELIPS.
JOHN NEWMAN.
A. MOODY.
W. H. COLSTON.
R. T. WHALLEY.

Copy, Mr. *Bridle's* written Defence;—referred to in the foregoing Report, (page 15.)

To the High Sheriff and Committee of Magistrates.

Gentlemen,

I NOW cheerfully obey the intimation received from you, to offer my defence to the accusations made against me by Mr. Hunt.

The difficulties imposed on me by the nature of the testimony, and the persons who gave it, I need not impress on you, who heard that testimony, and know the means by which it was obtained. I am persuaded, that when the magistrates recollect that my accuser is the man who has so seriously attempted to arraign the conduct of the magistracy of this county. That the person who accuses me of minute peculations, of revolting cruelty, and a uniform neglect of every duty, is the same man who imputes to the magistracy of the county of Somerset, that, actuated by a mean and selfish economy, they have crowded 200 prisoners in a gaol only adapted for half the number; that to add to this inhumanity, they have persisted, against every remonstrance, to compel the prisoners to drink of water offensive to the taste, and gradually destructive of health, and that from an absence of all feeling, and a culpable inattention to their duty, they have sanctioned, in my conduct, a gross disregard of a healthy cleanliness in the prison, and habitual cruelties to those under my charge. The same witnesses who have attacked me, have either directly or insidiously attacked the honour and humanity of the magistracy.

It is true, in *their* station, conduct and character, the justices may rely for a shield against malignity and perjury; the county feel too much indebted to their magistracy to alter their opinion on the oaths or allegations of felons, and persons who would not be heard in a court of justice, or heard with a suspicion and mistrust amounting to incredulity.

I have nothing to rely on, but a character for industry and integrity in my early life, which, without any other influence, obtained me my appointment from the magistrates of this county, and my services for thirteen years, in a situation open to every inquiry and investigation, and which services during that time have procured for me their repeated commendations and acknowledgments. I wish not to press it further than I ought, but I would appeal to every intelligent mind, if, considering who has been my prosecutor, and who the witnesses against me, and the communications that have been permitted between them, whether there be not just ground to suspect, that concert, contrivance, insidious promises, and artful insinuations, have led to the fabrication of tenfold more falsehood than that which has been detected and defeated. Every abandoned character within the prison is the natural enemy of the gaoler, because severe restraint or punishment falls only on such notorious offenders, on whom admonition and ordinary prison discipline have no effect.

An industrious and officious manufacture of petitions in behalf of some, and specious hopes excited in others, have been wickedly and artfully employed as the vehicles to accomplish my ruin.

Every unprincipled debtor, and every desperate convict, has found in my prosecutor a ready organ of every falsehood in the shape of a petition to the House of Commons, in which the magistracy and their humble officer have been libelled in the most gross and flagitious manner, and the ear of the Sovereign has been assailed by applications, through the medium of Mr. Hunt, for characters for whom neither the judges of the land, or the magistrates, could consistently, with a conscientious discharge of their duty, interfere. Is it then a subject of surprise, that such characters, under the illusion of hopes thus dexterously excited, as a grateful return to their patron and supposed benefactor, should lend him a wanton and profligate testimony, which, if detected, can neither injure their contaminated characters, or alter their just punishments, but, if believed and successful, would inspire sympathy, and lead to an expectation of a remission or commutation of their sentence. A person in the hands of such a prosecutor and witnesses, is in the snares of artifice and falsehood, and at the mercy of malignity and revenge. I venture to appeal to the magistrates to remember, what was the character which pointed me out for their selection as the keeper of the prison of Ilchester; some of them may recollect the unbought but strong attestations to my conduct, which weighed with them to give me the appointment against twenty-seven candidates. When I was first placed in the situation which was then deemed a situation of responsibility, requiring assiduity, firmness and integrity, there were only 62 prisoners; for their safe custody, and to preserve due discipline, I was assisted by two turnkeys; a gradual but rapid increase of offenders, has for a long time placed under my care an average of 200 prisoners; with the exception of a year or two, I have discharged my duties of safe custody and discipline with two turnkeys. I call to the recollection of the magistrates, who were acquainted with the gaol when I was first placed there, its state and condition as to filth, disorder, immorality and idleness, compared with its order, cleanliness and conduct for the last ten or twelve years. I can appeal with confidence to every magistrate who has attended the prison, for the gradual but uniform improvement that has taken place; and I can appeal to all, and especially to Sir John Acland, (who, when chairman, so assiduously devoted so much of his time to the welfare and concerns of Ilchester prison,) whether I have not uniformly exerted, to the best of my humble powers, the greatest zeal in the promotion of every improvement in the prison and the prisoners. I beg to refer to the testimony of Sir John Acland for the nature of my conduct and efforts for the eleven years he presided as chairman, and took so much interest in the character of the county prisons.

I intreat the magistrates to reflect on the duties and difficulties of my situation, under the increase of the prisoners. I beg to remind them of the thousands of prisoners whom I have had in my custody, and the few that ever preferred a complaint against me. That with such characters there is no want of disposition to complain, I need not impress on the committee, and I now most solemnly declare, in the presence of the Almighty, that I never did, during the thirteen years I have been in my present situation, ever prefer any complaints against prisoners, but from a conviction of their justice and necessity, nor ever directly or indirectly punished or illtreated any man because he complained of misconduct in myself or the officers under me. It is difficult for the magistrates to know the subtlety, artifice, insolence, and profligacy of a vast portion of the persons committed to my care. A prisoner may justly incur discipline and punishment, for a course of insult, trick and provocation that will scarcely bear recital, and yet, if permitted to prevail, would subvert all order and subordination.

I wish the committee, when they read over the evidence against me, and for my defence, to mark who the characters are, both debtors and convicts, who chiefly impeached my conduct! It is utterly impossible for me to go through the evidence and comment on it, I only entreat the committee to recollect who are the witnesses who depose to the facts on both sides. As a sample of the wanton and daring departure from all truth in the evidence against me, or rather in one case in support of the charges against the magistrates, I would remind the committee of the testimony of Charles Hill, (and I believe some others of the same description of character) who deposed that such was the dreadful unwholesomeness of the water I compelled the prisoners to drink, that severe effects of gravel were experienced by a great number of prisoners, and by some even in a few days. On a most accurate analysis of the water, by Sir George Gibbs and Mr. Eastwick, it appears that this imputation on the water is altogether void of truth and foundation.

Indeed

Indeed the committee could scarcely suppose, that the violent and almost instantaneous effects sworn to as produced by this water, needed any refutation. I advert to it only to show to what desperate lengths persons instigated by certain motives, without the control of principle or feeling, are tempted to venture! Many other instances of unfounded imputations or palpable and incredible exaggerations, the committee will detect in reading the evidence on both sides. Amongst the latter I implore the magistrates to compare the testimony of Samuel Hobbs, in respect to my supposed embezzlement of wine with the evidence of Tregenza. Hobbs says, that no wine could be administered to the sick prisoners without his knowledge, and he did not verily believe, that more than two quarts had been given during the whole time that he was a servant in my house. Tregenza swears, that Hobbs was never employed by him to carry things to the sick; that he never saw him in a sick ward; that his duty often called him from home for a week or upwards at a time, and that when at home, sometimes he was employed for a week or two together in the field, being in the house only mornings and evenings, when he was engaged in the stable. Tregenza's testimony is most materially corroborated by Mr. Palfreyman, and supported by Dr. Woodforde. Samuel Hobbs pretended, that nothing could be transacted as to the sick without his knowledge, whereas the testimony of Tregenza abundantly shows the falsehood of this insinuation. Hobbs imputes to me the grossest want of integrity, attention and humanity to the sick, I only request the committee to read the evidence of Dr. Woodforde, to place that man's unprincipled testimony in its true light. An attempt was made to taint me with a knowledge and participation in making a table and sofa out of wood belonging to the county. I am persuaded, the magistrates well know, that had I wanted such wood for such a purpose, I should have made no scruple in respectfully asking leave to have used it. The fact is, that the articles in question were not only made behind my back, and without my knowledge, but the table was represented to me to be Kinnear's. When first I had an intimation from what quarter the orders came for the table, I wrote the letter marked (A.) to my wife, whose misconduct had then been the cause of our separation. That letter was written in February, and the committee will perceive how little I was aware of what had been done behind my back. This allusion to my absence reminds me of my duty to advert to the evidence of my supposed frequent and long neglect of visiting the cells; as nine times out of ten, when I went about the prison, I went alone, it is almost impossible for me to rebut these insinuations, but I can most sacredly declare, that my absence is designedly and wilfully aggravated tenfold. It is true that I was absent from the prison 112 days in the last year on the duties of my office, and that with the number of prisoners I have lately had under my custody, and the accumulation of writing and accounts at all times, but more especially after absence from the prison, I have not been able to adhere to my own plan, and visit each cell as often as I could wish; but that I ever remained, when at home, twenty days, or a single week, without a regular and thorough inspection of my prison, I solemnly declare to be utterly untrue. The constant state of the prison, as to order, cleanliness and discipline, will, I trust, be some and no ordinary proof of the truth of what I alledge. I wish next to call the attention of the committee to the accusation respecting my being addicted to gamble; for this purpose I ask the magistrates to refer to the testimony of Mr. Webber, and Mr. and Mrs. Badcock, after that testimony, I trust I may look with confidence to the opinion of the committee on the nature of the transaction alluded to, and that so far from any habitual inclination to gamble, it will be seen that the occasion in question resulted from the artifice of the very man who strove to injure me by his evidence, and that I have not only not been accustomed to play for any value, but merely as a recreation when any friends or acquaintance were with me.

On the subject of my permitting Mr. Kinnear to come to my room, after locking-up hours, I am ready to own, on reflection, that I cannot justify that departure from the prison regulations; but I will freely and candidly confess what led me to a transgression, which, though not to be vindicated, I hope may be extenuated and excused. Mr. Kinnear had the appearance and manners of an educated and superior man. By leave of the magistrates, Mr. Kinnear for some considerable time, was lodged in my house. The magistrates, at least several of them, will do me the justice to recollect the state of Mr. Kinnear's health, and his appearance when he applied to be taken into the house. After he had been for some time with me, his manners and conduct had ingratiated me very much, and I own I felt an inclination to show him any indulgence. When Mr. Hunt came to the prison, and as both could not

be received into the house, it was deemed fit that Kinnear should quit it. Besides that I felt a disposition to show any kindness to Kinnear, my wife, with whose views and misconduct I was then unacquainted, took a zealous interest in obtaining any indulgence for him, without duly considering its impropriety, I therefore was prevailed on to admit him after lock-up hours to my house. Although the act was a departure from the strict regulation, I trust that the feeling and motive with which it was done, will be regarded as an extenuation. Another charge against me I enter on with a clear conscience, although I am aware I am not strictly justified by any rule or order of the prison; I allude to the case of Gardiner; I beg the committee to advert to the evidence of the character and conduct of that hardened and incorrigible prisoner; his habitual insolence of demeanor to me and other officers, his defiance of my authority, his cursing and villifying the magistrates and myself, are in evidence, but the evidence is but the shadow of the man's conduct; no admonitions, no restraint, no confinement, could reform or even temper his insolence. His violence of swearing and demeanor at last was not to be endured, and in an unguarded moment I resorted to the application of a blister to his head. This transaction has been magnified, inflamed, and discoloured by every species of trick and falsehood; I always regretted having done it, but that I did it to indulge cruelty or resentment, is utterly unfounded. It would be trespassing too far on the time and attention of the committee, if I undertook to enter on each separate accusation, and to compare the evidence in my defence, with the testimony produced by my accuser, pointing out the flagrant contradictions, the improbabilities, and exaggerations resorted to for my destruction.

To the imputation that I was negligent and inattentive to the duties of my station, I would humbly, but with confidence, oppose the state of the prison as to order, discipline and cleanliness, since my appointment to the condition of the gaol when I was elected keeper. To the charge that I devoted too much time and attention to society and recreation, I would respectfully suggest the anxiety and assiduity with which I originated or zealously promoted the various alterations and additions in the construction of the prison, and the system, industry and employment of the prisoners. I would also refer to my reports, extra statements and accounts for many years past as a testimony of zeal, attention and effort.

To the insinuations of neglect and inhumanity to the sick, I would answer by a reference to the evidence of Dr. Woodforde, Mr. Palfreyman and Tregenza; adding at the same time, in justice to the conscious rectitude of my heart under this accusation, that I did not believe that any human being who had witnessed my conduct to the sick or unfortunate, could have possessed sufficient malignity and hardihood to have seriously sought my ruin by branding me with the offence of cruelty and treacherous meanness to the afflicted under my custody. That in the thousand instances in which it was necessary to rely on my own judgment, and decide promptly, I may have erred in punishment or in pardon, I am not disposed to deny that I may have done that on the spur of the occasion, when immediate decision was necessary to the preservation of discipline, which, under cool and mature deliberation, I should have abstained from doing, or have acted differently, I hope I may acknowledge without guilt or disgrace. To judge with justice of my conduct, you will, I am persuaded, reflect on my situation; that I was surrounded by the unprincipled, the profligate, the subtle, and the insolvent, for thirteen years. You will remember the many thousand persons I have had in my custody, the difficulties I have had to contend with. The committee will, I trust, with satisfaction, advert to the testimony of Sir John Acland, to whom for eleven years my whole conduct was so intimately known, and to the evidence of many other able, zealous and attentive magistrates who have testified to my general good conduct and character. When the committee have reflected on the motives and spirit with which I have been accused, and have weighed the evidence in my favour, I venture to hope, and with humble confidence, that, although they may see errors and negligence in my conduct during the long time which I have zealously attempted to serve the county, yet that the general discharge of my duty and my character entitle me to cherish the expectation that the magistrates will not pass a judgment on me which will accomplish the ruin of my interests and the destruction of my character. My present and future welfare hinge on the decision that the committee may make. I shall be destitute of means and of happiness, if, whilst my errors are reproved, my intentions and services are not indulgently considered. Whatever may be the ultimate measure resorted to by the magistrates, I would fain entreat

entreat one favour, which I trust even rigorous justice will not deny me; the holding of my situation for such a period as would give me an opportunity sincerely and faithfully to demonstrate, by a course of conduct rectified, where my errors have been pointed out. That the first object I most deeply value is my character, and that I prize the approbation of the magistrates, under whom I have so long served, beyond all selfish or mercenary considerations. I ask this favour with no interested view, but from the sole motive of being enabled to earn the united favourable opinion and commendation of the magistrates of the county, that I may not be consigned to penury and misery by being compelled to quit my situation at a moment and under circumstances which would in effect blast my character and utterly destroy every prospect in life. My heart tells me this would be too severe a punishment of my errors; and my confidence in the committee assures me that they will rather lean to a lenient, than a severe, ruinous and irrecoverable judgment.

W. Bridle.

Number of Days the Governor was absent from the Gaol on public Business, in the Year 1820.

Out.	Home.	Number of Days.	Including Sundays.
January - 5th	January - 9th	5	1
„ - - 10th	„ - - 15th	6	„
February 10th	February 21st	12	2
March - 26th	April - 5th	11	2
April - 9th	„ - - 15th	7	„
„ - - 27th	May - 6th	10	1
May - 15th	„ - - 17th	3	„
„ - - 18th	„ - - 28th	11	2
June - 8th	June - - 10th	3	„
July - - 10th	July - - 14th	5	„
„ - - 29th	August - 4th	7	1
August - 12th	„ - - 20th	9	2
September 19th	September 26th	8	1
October - 16th	October - 21st	7	„
December 12th	December 19th	8	1
	TOTAL Days - - -	112	13

EXTRACT from Mr. *Bridle*'s Letter to Mrs. *Bridle*, referred to in his written Defence, (page 19.)

(A.)

" I mention this that you may know exactly how things are here, and that you may bring to your reason (if any be yet left) *what* I have said to you from time to time, and that you may fairly reason upon *all* the points I have argued on, and advised you to adopt; that you may *see*, and *fairly* reckon, *how* all those things have happened, and the *cause* of them; and I call to your attention the following particular as one. Your secretary, or work-table (black and bays) was secretly made by Hobbs, under your directions, in my absence, as well as those of Kinnear. You know he ought to have made nothing but by my order for the public use, and for my private use nothing; when I went to open it you told me it did *not* belong to me, that it was *Kinnear's*, &c. who may send it away, or give it to whoever he pleased; to my astonishment, I am told of its being made by your order, and the lock is charged me 14*s*. in Mr. Edwards's bill; I shall not remark on this, or any other thing, but leave them to you in their native colours."

COPY, MINUTES of the CLERK of the PEACE; referred to in the last foregoing Report, (*Vide* page 15.)

THE charity book was produced to the meeting, to show the amount of monies received and disbursed for the benefit of poor debtors confined in this gaol.

By the magistrates journal of the 24th October 1812, it appeared that Aaron Moody, esquire, ordered the sum of 19*l.* 14*s.* 3*d.* to be distributed; and at the gaol session held on the 10th of July 1817, 8*l.* 14*s.* with some old silver and copper, were ordered to be carried to the charity account.

A subscription book was also produced, commencing on the 21st of October 1809, for releasing persons confined for debt.

By the magistrates journal it appeared, that the governor was ordered to pay fees for the discharge of James Atwell.

By the gaoler's Occurrence book of the 15th December 1812, it appeared that a ton of coals was accounted for. By the charity book it appeared that 53 cwt. of coal were purchased at the sum of 3*l.* 19*s.* 6*d.*

By the Charity book of the 1st of March 1814, it appeared that 16*s.* 11*d.* were paid to a person of the name of Whittle, for coal; and,

By the gaoler's Occurrence book it appeared, that 9 cwt. of coal were distributed the following day.

By the Charity book of the 25th of December 1816, 17*s.* appeared debited for beer; and on the same day it appeared by the gaoler's Occurrence book, that beer was given away.

In the month of December 1817, 1*l.* 9*s.* were debited in the Charity book for the discharge of a poor debtor, which was noticed in the gaoler's Occurrence book.

A book, commencing on the 13th October 1820, which contained entries of different things procured by Matthew Hobbs, the late taskmaster, for the use of the gaol, and the following entry appeared written therein in Hobbs's hand-writing. "Nothing to be ordered nor made in the carpenter's shop without an order from "the governor, nor even a box for holding paste, nor no new job of work begun."

An Order, of which the following is a copy, was produced by Mr. Bridle.

"19 Feb. 1821. Meat ordered by surgeon for Edmund Treble, John Pender-"grass, Thomas Harris, and Sam. Hewitt, also Elizabeth Summers, who is to have "meat until further orders, with a pint of beer a-day, 10 lbs. W. B.

M. Hobbs."

A letter, dated February 1821, signed W. Bridle, addressed to Mrs. Bridle, Mr. Webber's, Plaistow, Essex, was delivered in, and the foregoing (*vide* page 21, A.) extract read therefrom.

Mr. Bridle stated that the letter was written long before any thing was said, either by the sheriff or magistrates.

A letter, dated 2d October 1812, signed James Moore, addressed to Mr. Bridle, was delivered in, and read, of which the following is a copy:

"Mr. Bridle," Sir,

"I once more take the liberty to address you respecting the gaol clock. I hope "there will be nothing in the report at the next Qua^{r} Sessions that will impead "the order for my being paid for it; indeed, I cannot tell what I shall do without "the money, as I am getting up some watches for a forign market, and cannot "finish them for want of cash, therefore I hope in God y^{r} report will be agreeable "to my wishes, that the clock goes well, I shall get paid for it, when I shall (as "I always thought of doing it) make Mrs. B. a present of a watch, which I flatter "myself will be worth her acceptance; be so good as to say, by return of post, if "it goes well, and if I may expect to be paid for it at the next Sessions, when "I'll come down to receive it, and bring the watch with me. And am,

"Y^{r} ob^{t} Serv^{t},

"Tewksbury, Oct. 2, 1812. "*Ja^{s} Moore.*"

"Mr. Bridle, Ilchester, Somerset."

A voucher of Crocker's, for straw taken from the records of the Easter session 1815, No. 9, was produced by the clerk of the peace, at the request of Mr. Bridle, by which it appeared that 18*s.* 9*d.* were deducted from £. 5. 7. 6. the amount of the bill which Mr. Bridle stated was for straw had for his private use.

Mr. Bridle observed that his horse was frequently used in the service of the county, without making any charge for it.

Bills paid in April 1813, and January and March 1814, for straw had for the private use of Mr. Bridle, were produced by him, and he observed that at the period here referred to, the refuse straw which came from the emptyings of the prisoners beds was not sufficient for his purposes. He delivered in a statement in writing of the days he was absent from the Gaol on public business in the year 1820. (*Vide* statement, page 21.)

An extract of a letter from Mr. Bridle, dated the 1st March 1820 (the original being in the possession of the commissioners who lately sat at Ilchester Gaol) addressed to the Gaol Committee, was delivered in, and read.

" With due submission, I beg to be permitted to suggest the propriety and " necessity of a rule confining the officers of the gaol during the hours of service, " to their respective duties ; at present the turnkey's wives are messengers to the " gaols, the husband occasionally assist them, and go into the town for their errands ; " on other occasions, the post office, coach office, &c. is an excuse. The task- " master has a much greater latitude, having for ever an excuse, as going to the " plumber's, the smith's, the shops, &c. for some trifling article stated to be wanted " in the service, which puts it completely out of my power to prevent excursions to " the town. The turnkeys should not leave the gaol during the hours of service " but with leave, and the taskmaster should not on any account leave his work- " shops during the hours of labour. If he has prisoners employed at any distance " from the manufactory, he may have the assistance of a turnkey on application. " The junior turnkey having no fixed residence in the gaol, may perhaps be well " employed as occasional porter on commissions and errands to the town. Bells to " communicate by night with the officers of the gaol are very much wanted, on " which subject I refer you to Mr. Bryer, Mrs. Bridle, and the turnkey Pike.

" I have the honour to be, &c.
" *W. Bridle.*"

By the gaoler's Occurrence book of the 24th of July 1820, it appeared that Hobbs, the late taskmaster, was absent without leave ; and by the magistrates Journal of the 5th of August following, it appeared that the Rev. Dr. Colston and Aaron Moody, esquire, made an order respecting the taskmaster's absence, pursuant to this entry, cautioning him against a repetition of his conduct, on the governor's promising to forgive him.

Mr. Bridle observed that it had recently been discovered that a prisoner had worn his stockings a fortnight and three days without changing. He referred the meeting to all entries in the magistrates Journal, and to all reports made to the quarter sessions relating to the gaol.

The preceding is a true copy of the original Reports. Given under my hand the 19th day of February 1822.

EDWARD COLES,
Clerk of the Peace for the County of Somerset.

IVELCHESTER GAOL,

SOMERSET.

COPIES OF

REPORTS of the High Sheriff and Magistrates of the County of *Somerset*; on an Inquiry into Charges preferred against the Keeper of the said Gaol by Mr. *Henry Hunt*, a Prisoner confined therein.

Ordered, by The House of Commons, *to be Printed,*
21 *February* 1822.

BIBL. LONDIN. UNIV.